

Workingmen's Houses,  
Nicholas Thornton House  
365 Southern Avenue  
Dubuque  
Dubuque County  
Iowa

HABS No. IA-159-AD

HABS  
10W4,  
31-DUBU,  
14-AD-

DRAWINGS

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Rocky Mountain Regional Office  
P.O. Box 25287  
Denver, Colorado 80225

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Workingmen's Houses,

## Nicholas Thornton House

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**Site Location:** 365 Southern Avenue  
Dubuque, Dubuque County, Iowa  
DOT designation: Resource Site No. 1.31  
Cadastral grid : SW1/4 NE1/4 S36 T89N R2E  
USGS quadrangle: Dubuque South Iowa 7.5'  
UTM coordinates: 15.691700.4705750  
Lot dimensions : 43.2'x 137' : .14 acre  
Lot description: East 30' of Lot 1 of  
John Breakey's Dubuque

**Present Owner:** Iowa Department of Transportation  
**Present Usage:** vacant  
**Present Condition :** fair

**Overall Dimensions:** 3-story main block: 18'0"x 22'1"; front porch:  
6'2"x 22'1"; 2-story rear wing: 18'3"x 16'8".

**Orientation :** south

**Architectural Description :** Plan type : 3-story rectangle with rear 2-story ell  
addition.  
Foundation: stone perimeter walls, partially parged.  
Structure : wood frame, with stone bearing walls on first  
floor of main block and rear ell.  
Ext. walls: brick pattern asphalt siding in upper levels of  
main block and rear of rear ell; coursed lime-  
stone ashlar on first floor of main block and  
rear ell; narrow-exposure wood beveled siding  
on side walls of rear ell; 3-tab asphalt  
shingles in main block gables.  
Roofs : main block is side-gabled with main roof exten-  
sion over front porch; moderately pitched gable  
over rear ell; 3-tab asphalt shingles through-  
out.  
Chimneys : one centrally placed interior chimney straddles  
roof, made of parged stone.  
Dormers : none  
Windows : 6/6 double hung main block, 6/1 double hung on  
ell; plain casings, slip sills, hood molds  
triple-banked 2-light on east side of ell, top  
story.  
Openings : All doors on front are 5-paneled; one door on  
each story; plain casings, heads and sills; on  
the east side of ell is an entrance with a deep  
reveal.  
Porches : full-width, 3-story front porch, covered by

extension of main block roof; all railings are waist high; 1st floor porch has open concrete block railing, with four concrete block posts supporting the porch roof. Porches of the upper two floors have closed wood railing, wooden posts supported the ceilings and plank flooring. the railing is sheathed in asphalt siding like that of the house. Ell has shed-roofed porch on its east side, enclosed on three sides.

Details : Boxed cornices; front gabled shed with roll roofing, beveled edge siding at northwest corner of lot.

Construction Date : c.1856

Architecture Style: Side gabled box

Physical History : John Breakey [Breaky; Brakey] platted a residential subdivision on the north side of Southern Avenue in May 1855. Consisting of ten variously shaped lots, John Breakey's Dubuque, as it was called, was one of the earliest such developments in south Dubuque. A month after his plat was recorded, Breakey sold Lot 1 to Patrick McNamara for \$240. McNamara in turn subdivided his lot, and in October 1856 he sold the east 30' to Nicholas Thornton for \$200. Thornton is noted as living at this address in 1859, and from this it is assumed that he built the house soon after acquiring the land. Thornton, a laborer, lived here with his wife, Margaret, and their children, Patrick, Mary, Ellen, Nicholas, Rosanna and Catherine, until his death on December 22, 1862. His wife later remarried, but lost the house to foreclosure in 1880. Patrick McNamara, who had been living in his own house on the other part of the property, re-acquired the building in 1883, selling it in May 1891 to Catherine Welsh. Welsh quit claimed the property six years later to Lizzie O'Brien, who sold it in 1917 to Jacob Entringer. The Oliver Merz family purchased the property in the 1940s and owned it until its recent acquisition by the Iowa Department of Transportation. Although altered (most visible of which was the residing of the exterior walls with asphalt in 1973), the building retains its overall form.

Significance: Sited immediately next to a main artery into Dubuque and configured with its stacked front porch and stone lower level, this building has the appearance of an early roadhouse, as suggested by local lore. However, no archival information has been located to verify this. The building does not appear as a boarding house, hotel or saloon in any of Dubuque's early city directories, and its owners are alternately listed as miners or laborers. Although its beginnings are obscure, this house is significant as one of the earliest such structures built along Southern Avenue in the 19th Century. It is exceeded in age along this street by only one other house in the study area: the John H. Kelly House [HABS No. IA-159-W]. This structure is a distinctive and enigmatic remnant of early Dubuque.

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**References:**

Dubuque City Directories: 1857 - 1970.  
Sanborn Insurance Maps: 1879, 1884, 1891, 1909, 1972.  
Dubuque County Assessment Record: 3-32-2-29.  
Dubuque City Building Permit Record: 365 Southern Avenue.  
Iowa Department of Transportation, "Draft Environmental  
Impact Statement - Cultural Resources Assessment."  
Land Title Abstract (located at Iowa Department of  
Transportation, Ames Iowa).

**Compiler:**

Clayton B. Fraser, Fraserdesign, Loveland Colorado.  
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